



PROFILES IN soil health

Oakridge Dairy

- Connecticut's largest dairy farm
- Approximately 4,000 acres
- 2,800 Holstein cows
- 2,000 acres corn silage
- 1,000 acres grass haylage
- Rye based mixed cover crops
- Sunflower field for the community



Innovative Dairy Is Steadfast in Soil Health Commitment.

Oakridge – the state's largest dairy farm – is located in North Central Connecticut. It was founded in the late 1890's by Adolph Bahler and his family. He got his start with dairy cows, but also grew tobacco and potatoes as cash crops. Since then, five generations of Bahler's have committed to improving their products. Through the years, the family has held on to the belief that quality doesn't happen by chance; it's done on purpose. Integrity has been their priority from the beginning.

Their goal is simple: great farms make great food. They strive to uphold that, beginning with healthy cows and homegrown food, cared for by great people. In 2016, the family built their current 318,000 sq. ft. facility with three things in mind: the comfort of their cows, efficiency, and sustainability.

IT'S MORE THAN JUST COWS

At Oakridge Dairy there's more to do than just milking cows. From birthing calves to caring for their milking cows, to managing the land and growing quality feed for their herd. Each hard-working division focuses on their area of expertise to achieve their goal – together.

IT'S ABOUT HEALTHY SOIL

The Oakridge Team believes you must be proactive in finding innovative ways to run a farm and is steadfast in their belief in soil health principles. The Crops Team has implemented new and innovative practices to increase the soil's organic matter and improve microbial activity while harvesting better yields and reducing their fuel, fertilizer, and chemical use.

- **Grass Management**

The grass management was changed by adjusting the cutting from 2" to 3" and harvesting at optimal forage quality. The higher cutting height has noticeably increased the regrowth rate which allows for more root stability and less root shed. At 3 inches, the additional canopy height helps shade the soil which reduces solar heat – important in the warmest weather – allowing the roots to keep functioning at higher temperatures. The additional root structure also helps manage soil moisture, which means better drainage on the fields when wet, and better soil moisture when dry, allowing the farm to manage grass cuttings for optimal forage value.

- **No-Till**

The farm was also transitioned from conventional till to no-till in the 2010's. In the past, preparation before planting often involved a plow and at least two passes across the field with a disc, followed by more tillage for weed control, and the occasion crust busting when conditions called for it. In addition, there was manure to apply. This was followed by fertilization after crops began to pop up, and insect control if pests became a problem – each time requiring a pass through the field – which involved time, fuel, and equipment costs. No-till has helped the Crops Team reduce the number of passes made on a field, which is especially helpful in early spring when soils are vulnerable and time is short.

- **Cover Crops**

Cover crops have played an important role at Oakridge Dairy. The Crops Team began experimenting with different mixes in 2015, diversifying from the standard single species winter rye cover to a multi-species cover, hoping to find a mix that worked best for their soils and management style. Mixes have



included radishes, clovers, oats, peas, and beans. Not every choice has been successful, but they have learned from each attempt. Cover crops are applied as quickly as possible after harvest – often within the same week.

FARM TECHNOLOGY AND RECORDS

The Oakridge Team has invested in new technology with both hardware and software. Over the years, Oakridge has purchased a grain drill, a precision planter, GPS equipment, and software to connect everything - and everyone - together. This has helped increase germination and efficiencies from crops. They have worked to find methods to hold the soil, maintain and cycle nutrients within the root zone, and increase the biological activity both within and around their soils. Some of this technology has had the unintended consequence of highlighting which fields or field areas need additional effort related to soil health or soil function and has helped to keep the soil biology and nutrient cycle functioning at a high level.

COMMUNITY

The staff at Oakridge Farm take their role in the community very seriously and work with them to promote a healthy, local source of food, as well as a healthy place to live. The soil health efforts are a big influence in both the appearance and the perception of the farm. The lush covered soils and the open space are things the community holds dear and the farm embraces.

THE FUTURE

Now well into a 5th generation, Oakridge Dairy's goal is to get fresh, great tasting milk you can trust from the parlor to your home as quickly as possible. Fifty years ago, milkmen delivered milk to your doorstep. You knew where it came from, and you knew it was fresh. Oakridge Dairy has reinvented those days with their latest endeavor – The Modern Milkman. It's old fashioned farming and service meeting today's needs. The Modern Milkman is a weekly subscription-based box service that delivers fresh Oakridge milk along with local, farm fresh eggs, butter, yogurt and cheese right to your doorstep. They believe this is the future – where community and honest dairy come together.